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ABSTRACT

The choice of principals is too important to be left to chance. Dynamic, committed leaders not only help determine the quality of teachers that are recruited, but provide the key to effective schools where the battle for excellence will be won or lost. Section 1, "The Effective Principal," outlines the tasks that an effective principal performs. Such a principal is an administrative and instructional leader who promotes school improvement and motivates teachers and staff to share and work for a vision of the school that will enable them to meet their own highest expectations. Section 2, "The Selection Process," covers the development of selection policies, certification, training, assessment, principal placement, orientation, and on-the-job evaluation. Section 3, "Assessment Methods: Theory and Practice," examines assessment methods, and information is provided on biographical data, tests, interviews, job samples, and job simulations at assessment centers. Information is given about computer software designed to accompany this booklet, and a listing of educational experts is provided for further information. An annotated bibliography and a principal selection checklist conclude the booklet. (WTH)

PRINCIPAL SELECTION GUIDE

Principal Selection Guide

June 1987

U.S. Department of Education
William J. Bennett
Secretary

Office of Educational Research and Improvement
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Foreword

Selecting good leaders is always important, but it is absolutely essential when they form the educational vanguard that will lead our country into the 21st century. Principals are this vanguard, and they have never faced a more important or challenging task.

During the next 10 years, almost half of all current principals will retire. The quality of the men and women who take their places will greatly influence the kind of education we enjoy, and eventually, the kind of society in which we live. The leadership they provide will determine, to a large extent, what kind of teachers are recruited, how many good ones stay in the profession, and how many ineffective ones leave. We must take this opportunity to fill our schools with dynamic, committed leaders, for they provide the key to effective schools where we will either win or lose the battle for excellence in education.

The choice of principals is too important to be left to chance—with patronage, politics, favoritism, or familiarity edging out merit. Their significance demands that we make every effort to find, hire, and groom good principals who will provide the leadership that American schools need.

In publishing this brief *Principal Selection Guide*, we at the Department of Education want to share with the American public and with those in the education community some of what has been learned about effective principals, good selection processes, and reliable methods of assessment. This is information that those selecting principals need to have, but it is also information from which all of us—teachers, parents, and citizens—can benefit.

I am confident that Americans are eager to find and hire the kind of strong principals described here. By focusing attention on the kinds of school leaders to look for and how to select them, we increase the likelihood of achieving excellent schools. This is not only a worthy goal, but one entrusted to the Department of Education by law. When the Office of Education was established in 1867, it received a mandate to "promote the cause of education throughout the country." In publishing the *Principal Selection Guide*, we are doing just that.

William J. Bennett
Secretary of Education

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Introduction

Amidst the current clamor for school reform, parents, teachers, and legislators often ask, "If you could do only one thing to improve schools today, what would it be?" I would hire the best principal I could find and then give that person ample authority and heavy responsibility. A great school almost always boasts a crackerjack principal. Leadership is among the crucial elements in educational success.

Unfortunately, the means by which American school principals are selected, trained, and certified are often ill-suited to the employment of savvy, bold, enterprising leaders. Sure, there are excellent principals in many of our schools, but we need many more of them. We are not apt to get them, however, unless more people in the education community, as well as the public, are aware of what constitutes an effective principal, a good selection process, and reliable methods of assessment.

In the *Principal Selection Guide* we have tried to provide such information for those selecting principals—whether in public or private schools. The *Guide* is divided into three parts. The first discusses effective school leaders, the tasks they perform, and how they accomplish them. The vignettes describe some outstanding principals in diverse circumstances who excel at what they do.

Section II describes the elements of a good selection process—from the formation of a pool of candidates through opportunities for professional development on-the-job. The final section enumerates five methods of assessment, describes them briefly, and suggests how, when, and to whom they are most useful. At the end of part II there is a handy checklist that reviews the major steps in the selection process. The end of the booklet contains suggestions concerning "Where to Go for Further Information." On this page you will find information about a software package designed to accompany this booklet. This material, which is accessible and inexpensive, should help you tailor your selection procedure to your specific requirements and circumstances. For your convenience, we have also added a short, annotated bibliography and a "Principal Selection Checklist."

This *Principal Selection Guide* was prepared as part of the mission of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement to provide information, ideas, and research findings to education professionals, laymen, and policymakers across the country so that they can do their best to improve their schools and colleges. We operate on the conviction that the American people, armed with good information, can be counted on to make their schools what they want them to be. I have never been more optimistic than I am now—when nearly the whole country is aware of the need for school reform and much of the education community is eager to provide the strong leadership that we need.

The energies and knowledge of many individuals have gone into the creation of this *Principal Selection Guide*. The Project Director, Gene Huddle, working with team members, Marshall Sashkin, Hunter Moorman, Rene Gonzalez, and Yvonne Carter, did yeoman's service in researching and preparing the manuscript. Jim Bencivenga, Director of Information Services, Sharon Horn, Program Coordinator, and Nancy Paulu, Branch Chief, supervised the many drafts that Carson Daly wrote and edited. Numerous others, both inside and outside the Department, read the *Guide* and offered their advice and guidance. I am grateful to all of them—both to those mentioned here, and to the numerous peer reviewers and others cited in the acknowledgements at the end of this book.

Chester E. Finn, Jr.
Assistant Secretary and
Counselor to the Secretary

Section I

The Effective Principal

Above all, effective principals are leaders. They command attention, inspire respect, set high goals, and motivate teachers and students to meet them. They achieve these results not only because of what they do, but because of what they are. As Roland Barth of Harvard University observes, "It's a question of moral leadership. You need to find somebody who can find the tall ground and stand on it."

The integrity, knowledge, and skill of effective principals elicit admiration. Their vision of what the school can achieve sparks the imagination, and their personal commitment to learning often encourages imitation. But it is their devotion to the welfare of those entrusted to them that wins the trust of the students, teachers, and staff, enabling school leaders to launch an ambitious program that will revitalize or even transform a school. To do this, school leaders foster a spirit of collegiality, cooperation, and teamwork. They recognize that no principal succeeds alone.

Effective principals possess a fierce determination that "what should be shall be," and they radiate an infectious enthusiasm for excellence. When they make a mistake, as even the best of them sometimes do, they have the courage to try again. Even in defeat, effective principals prepare for victory.

Effective principals recognize that schools—public and private, urban and rural, elementary and secondary—require different styles of leadership, suited to their specific situations. They tailor their actions to the needs of faculty and students, the nature of the community, and the history of the school. In a school with a history of high faculty turnover and few experienced teachers, for example, the effective principal may emphasize staff development and incentives, whereas one in a school with disciplinary problems will stress defining and enforcing clear standards of behavior. Effective principals seek creative solutions—even if it means taking risks:

As principal of Artesia High School in Lakewood, California, Mara Clisby did both. She moved into the eye of the hurricane, putting her desk in the girls' bathroom, replacing gang fights there with meetings and counseling sessions. Unintimidated by gang violence, low test scores, and the daily absence of more than a quarter of the students, she ended fights, cut absenteeism to one percent, and encouraged students to set their sights on college. The result? Two years after she took over, 80 percent of the students were university-bound.[1]

How do principals revitalize, or even transform their schools? Effective leaders improve schools in three vital ways. First, they create a clear, compelling vision of where the school is heading and of what the school, its students, faculty, and staff can become. Second, they nurture conditions conducive to achieving that vision. Finally, they inspire, encourage, and reward achievement.

[1] *Good Secondary Schools: What Makes Them Tick?* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office for the Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1986), p. 3.

Creating A Vision

Effective school leaders have broad visions that are clear, active, ambitious, and performance-oriented. They are intellectually and emotionally committed to meeting challenges, producing achievements, and uniting the school in shared dedication to excellence. They also enlist the community's support by communicating their goals for the school to parents and other local residents. School leaders realize that a merely personal or idiosyncratic vision cannot win the necessary support to inspire students and staff, spark their enthusiasm, and kindle their imaginations so that they make the principal's vision their own:

Marva Collins' vision literally revolutionized the lives of her students. She began Chicago's Westside Prep in a basement with a handful of disadvantaged students who had been rejected elsewhere. Her vision of what they could become transformed socially maladjusted children who could not read or write into winners of statewide educational awards, into "citizens of the world," who saw education as their way out of poverty. The "school creed" that she wrote embodies the vision that made Westside Prep a success: "My success and... education can be companions that no misfortune can depress, no crime can destroy, and no enemy can alienate. Without education, [one] is a slave.... Time and chance come to us all. I can be either hesitant or courageous. I can...stand up and shout: 'This is my time and my place. I will accept the challenge.' "[2]

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[2]Marva Collins and Civia Tamarkin, *Marva Collins' Way* (Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher, Inc., 1982). The school creed appears on pages 144-145.

Creating Conditions to Achieve the Vision

Effective principals create conditions to help them realize their vision. This often means repairing the school, instituting better discipline, hiring new teachers, and handling diverse managerial and instructional difficulties. When the school is almost all that stands between students and poverty, crime, alcoholism, and drug addiction, the principal faces even greater challenges:

Father James Gilg, head of Omaha's Father Flanagan High School, helps students acquire the character and skills that will keep them from slipping through the cracks. He provides a specially designed curriculum and gives clear guidelines to his youngsters, most of whom are poor, black, and from broken homes. He strictly enforces rules on attendance, punctuality, discipline, and drugs, and requires all to take courses in parenting, employability, home maintenance, keyboarding, and computer skills. The school provides everyone with breakfast and lunch; nursery care for students' babies; AA and Alateen meetings during the day; a special drug program; and a legal advisor. An emergency fund pays for an evening meal, a bed for the night, or a trip to the clinic. To succeed, Father Gilg says, "You have to immerse yourself in the situation." And he does. He runs a foster home for 4 or 5 of his students, providing one more condition to help his "kids" succeed and help his vision for them become reality.[3]

[3]The information about Father Flanagan High School is taken from material published by the school, and Father Gilg's comments are quoted from a telephone interview.

Inspiring, Encouraging, and Rewarding Achievement

Educational leaders improve their schools by motivating the staff, students, and community to work toward their shared goals. Effective principals support, inspire, and motivate people by fostering a spirit of teamwork and collegiality. They also value initiative, reward success, and celebrate accomplishments:

At Armstrong High School in Richmond, Virginia, principal Bill Joyner recognizes that motivation is the key to inspiring teachers and students to achieve. He honors both with special student and staffer of the month awards, posts their pictures, celebrates teachers' birthdays, gives them presents, leads classes in rousing renditions of "Happy Birthday," and sponsors faculty events like ice cream parties and fashion shows. Mr. Joyner also takes all students of the month to dinner, gives honor roll students certificates and "Academic Achiever" tee shirts, takes them to Busch Gardens amusement park at the end of the year, and invites them and their parents to a special breakfast. He gives those with 2.4-2.9 (out of 4.0) averages "upward bound achiever" certificates and offers those with "C" or below averages the "Most Improved Award." Those flunking two or more subjects are required to make a contract with the school and their parents to try to improve. A perfect attendance award with a tee shirt proclaiming this feat encourages all students to shun absenteeism. Such encouragement has raised faculty and student attendance—along with scholastic achievement.[4]

[4]The information about Mr. Joyner and his school was verified in a telephone interview with him.

The Principal's Tasks

Although the principalship cannot be pigeonholed and no two principals are exactly alike, they all perform certain instructional and managerial tasks. Perhaps the most important of these is forging a vibrant "school culture." This grows out of the principal's vision for the school, the teaching and curriculum, teacher and student expectations, the school goals, and the way these are communicated both inside and outside the school. Principals' attitudes set the example for students and staff; they define scholastic goals for the school and actively support the curriculum and teaching that promote those goals. Even if effective principals are not themselves "classroom coaches," they ensure that teachers have good instructional models, coaching, and developmental opportunities:

Ken Vance, the principal of Pocahontas County High School, nestled in the Appalachian mountains of West Virginia, not only teaches a countywide class on school improvement, he also provides vibrant instructional leadership by sponsoring numerous workshops, subsidizing teachers' trips to state and national conferences when possible, and encouraging team-teaching. He visits classes at least twice a week, sometimes teaching them himself, and gives teachers a major voice in all decisions concerning curriculum and scheduling. He also encourages them to observe each other in the classroom and even to visit other schools and analyze other programs. He introduces a quote, article, or issue related to learning at faculty meetings, and features a quotation that expresses his commitment to education on all memoranda. Perhaps the secret of Ken Vance's successful instructional leadership lies in his respect for his teachers and their ability. "They're out there on the field," he comments, "so I listen to what they say."[5]

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[5]This information about Ken Vance and Pocahontas High School was obtained in a phone interview with him.

Effective principals use their managerial skills to create an atmosphere in which good teaching and high achievement flourish. By efficiently managing their staff, the budget, the building, student services, and the school's relationship with the community, they provide the necessary base for a strong school culture:

Making the most of his managerial skills, Bill Koller, the principal of Byng High School in Ada, Oklahoma, revitalized school spirit by changing the building's appearance. When he realized that the school's dilapidated, depressing condition was demoralizing students and inhibiting their performance, he transformed his school into a showplace. He worked with the students and faculty to acquire donated land, stockpile reasonably-priced building materials, and encourage vocational students and the maintenance staff to do the construction. The result, according to one visitor, is "a masterpiece of construction and architecture... that would be the envy of a large metropolitan school." Even more impressive than the external improvement was the effect it had on the students' and faculty's attitude: they no longer "think of themselves as poor, they think of themselves as resourceful."[6]

[6]Thomas B. Corcoran and Bruce L. Wilson, *The Search for Successful Secondary Schools* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Research for Better Schools, 1986), p. 61.

As these vignettes indicate, the principal performs many, varied instructional and managerial tasks. They include:

- Establishing an atmosphere conducive to learning;
- Setting high expectations for faculty, staff, and students;
- Setting school goals;
- Supervising teaching and curriculum development;
- Communicating effectively inside the school;
- Building parent and community support;
- Building sound relations with the central office;
- Monitoring organizational information;
- Coordinating school activities;
- Managing financial resources;
- Maintaining the school building;
- Directing school support services; and
- Staffing.

Establishing an Atmosphere Conducive to Learning

One of the principal's primary tasks is creating an atmosphere conducive to learning. This means not only minimizing disciplinary problems and vandalism, but also fostering a climate of order and respect in which teachers and students can thrive. To minimize disruptions and distractions, the principal ensures that everyone knows school policies concerning discipline and then enforces them fairly and consistently. He or she also nurtures school spirit, revives flagging morale, and encourages a sense of *esprit de corps.*

Setting High Expectations

By asking teachers and students to expect the most of themselves, principals lay the foundation for high achievement. They believe that everyone in the school can learn and they ensure that teachers and students act on that belief. Educational leaders convey their aspirations for the school during assemblies, at teachers' meetings, in newsletters, and at schoolwide celebrations and ceremonies. Most importantly, they exemplify the beliefs and behavior they encourage: when it comes to high expectations, they begin with themselves.

Setting School Goals

Principals who expect a great deal of themselves, their teachers, and their students invariably set high goals. Effective school leaders not only set specific, clear, realistic goals that teachers and students can adopt, but also use time, resources, and the results of education research to achieve them. They monitor feedback on the school's performance and unite the school and community in a shared dedication to goals that will transform their vision into reality.

Supervising Curriculum and Teaching

Assessing curriculum and evaluating teaching are two of most principals' main responsibilities. They keep abreast of research on curriculum design and development, compare their own assessments with those of knowledgeable colleagues, and solicit the advice of instructional experts when necessary. Coordinating the curriculum through instructors, lead teachers, department heads, and curriculum supervisors, effective principals encourage their staffs to use the most effective teaching methods to increase student performance. They encourage the staff's professional development through conferences, seminars, workshops, lectures, extra courses, and special training. They also help teachers apply the skills they learn from these programs in the classroom.

Communicating Effectively Inside the School

Many principals' tasks depend upon their ability to communicate effectively. Two-thirds of their daily activities consist of brief exchanges, often on a one-to-one basis. They meet regularly with students, teachers, parents, planning councils, advisory groups, department heads, and their own supervisors and peers. Excellent interpersonal communication skills – listening actively, asking effective questions, and giving feedback skillfully – are critical to the job.

Building Parent and Community Support

Effective principals reach out to parents and the community through the media, as well as through students, teachers, school activities, newspapers, and newsletters. They speak articulately and write persuasively, forging ties between people and programs that will benefit the school. Some principals even make videotapes of the school's story to promote community involvement. They also invite area residents to the school, host "back-to-school" nights, sponsor adult education courses, and encourage students to perform community services.

At Roosevelt-Lincoln Junior High in Salina, Kansas, for example, musical students entertain the community several times a year; others officiate at the Special Olympics, and still others participate in the Adopt-a-Grandparent program. Effective principals frequently solicit the help and expertise of community members. Twin Peaks Middle School in Poway, California, for instance, sponsors a "Grandpeople Program" in which retirees teach art, science, reading and spelling– enriching themselves as well as their students.[7]

Principals who get the strongest support from community members invite them not only to contribute their time, energy, and resources, but also to help judge school performance and set school goals.

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[7] *Good Secondary Schools: What Makes Them Tick?*, pp. 16-17.

Building Sound Relations with the Central Office

Since, as Aristotle observed long ago, people are political animals, principals must build sound relations with the school system's central office. A good working relationship with the district, diocese, or governing body ensures maximum efficiency. Indeed, one of the school leader's primary talents is his or her ability to work effectively in an organization—interpreting, adapting, and implementing policies decided on at a higher level.

Monitoring Organizational Information

In a way, all of the principal's tasks hinge on this one. The school leader must know the best way to get information and the most efficient way to use it. Effective principals "stay in touch" so that they can give constructive feedback and monitor how well school goals are being achieved. They listen, observe, and communicate almost constantly. They walk corridors and visit classrooms, listening to and talking with students and staff. When one particularly effective high school principal in New Jersey donned a pedometer to see how much he "walked the halls," he found that he was logging more than 10 miles a day.

Coordinating School Activities

Coordinating school activities is an indispensable managerial task because students cannot learn effectively when everything is disorganized. By managing time and scheduling events well, the principal guarantees that teaching is not interrupted, that events during the day complement learning, and that after-school activities encourage the widest possible participation and attendance. School leaders support a reasonable number of extra-curricular activities, and organize them so that they foster school spirit and enhance learning.

Managing Financial Resources

Since no school can be effective if it is enmeshed in fiscal disaster, the principal must be a skilled financial manager, able to use the school's resources well. In both the public and private sectors, this may require not only budgeting what the school has, but also fundraising to provide what it lacks.

Maintaining the School Building

When people first walk into a school, they immediately notice whether the halls are clean and the building is well maintained. Since its physical appearance reflects the school culture and affects how teachers and students feel about themselves and their school, effective principals provide a safe, clean, attractive building that creates an atmosphere conducive to learning.

Directing School Support Services

Directing school services is a vital aspect of the principal's job. No principal can be effective unless he or she can successfully coordinate and monitor the health, bus, and food services, work with traffic directors, supervise groundskeepers, and devise class schedules. Mundane as these activities may seem, the effective manager coordinates them so that the school functions smoothly.

Staffing

No matter how beautiful the building, well coordinated the services and events, and spectacular the principal's fiscal wizardry, the school rises or falls on the quality of its teachers. The effective principal actively recruits able, committed staff members. He or she fosters good teaching by defining goals, encouraging high expectations, delegating responsibilities, and giving teachers constructive feedback on their performance. Recognizing that learning involves trial and error, effective principals reward honest effort as well as achievement. They express their appreciation through notes, visits, calls, compliments, and public recognition. Shrewdly attending to large and small matters alike, educational leaders give their staffs the incentive to excel.

Summary

An effective principal is an administrative and instructional leader who promotes school improvement. He or she not only performs managerial and instructional tasks well, but also motivates teachers and staff to share and work for a vision of the school that will enable them to meet their own highest expectations. The effective principal does this by creating a shared vision, removing obstacles to learning, finding resources, and gaining the support of students, teachers, parents, and the community.

Section II

The Selection Process

When most people think of selection, they think of the decision to hire a candidate. If we add the term "process" they may also envision the last round of competition among the finalists. A comprehensive selection process, however, entails much more. It begins long before a vacant principalship exists and continues long after it has been filled. The stages of this process should be coordinated with the needs of prospective candidates and principals in the various phases of their careers. A comprehensive selection process identifies potential principals years before they are ready to serve and creates a series of courses, training programs, and opportunities—such as apprenticeships, internships, and mentoring arrangements—to help them become effective school leaders. After they have been hired, the selection process includes procedures to orient principals in their new jobs, evaluate their performances, and encourage their professional development.

Although the selection process is divided into chronological steps in this section, it is not mechanical or strictly sequential. In fact, several steps may occur almost simultaneously, and they often overlap and interconnect.

Developing Selection Policies

The district, diocese, or governing body that has jurisdiction over the school determines how the selection process operates. The members of this supervisory body ensure that the process meshes with their overall plan for developing administrators and is tailored to meet their needs and requirements.

Before the board can decide upon a selection process, its members must first agree on their aims: What kind of schools do they want to foster? What kind of administrator are they looking for? What is their vision not just for one school

or individual principal, but for all the schools and principals in their jurisdiction? Since principals are often judged on how well their vision reflects the community's values, selectors should consider what those values are and formally or informally solicit the opinions of parents, teachers, and students concerning the kind of principal they want and need. Even technically sound selection processes will fail if selecting officials have not scrupulously examined their own visions of the schools, their aims in selecting candidates, and their attitudes toward overall administrative development.

Once selectors have agreed upon their aims, they can decide what strategy will best help attain them. This strategy will determine how they develop and prepare their pool of potential applicants. It will also determine how they handle assessment, orientation, on-the-job evaluation, and staff development. Finally, this strategy will dictate how and what districts and governing bodies assess when they are looking for a principal.

Creating the Pool

Long before specific vacancies arise, selectors should identify a pool of potential leaders and develop a "pipeline" to the principalship. Such a system can provide the developmental experiences that will qualify members of the pool to be principals.

There are many ways to create the pool. Some districts ask those interested in being administrators to sign up on a list of potential principal candidates and then offer them special courses and training. In other areas, the pool is recruited from those interested in combining instruction with administration. In large districts, the pool may draw on head teachers, master teachers, and heads of departments, as well as on those who have participated in state or countywide task forces. Gifted teachers, who have taught in several different schools and have developed expertise in special educational areas and school issues, are also natural candidates for the pool. Small districts, ones with few administrators, and those encompassing large geographical or rural areas, may have to collaborate with other districts or recruit outside their own locale to create a sufficiently large, well qualified pool of candidates.

Certification

Although few parochial and independent schools require principal certification, all states require that candidates for principalships in public schools be certified. To receive certification one must usually hold a teaching certificate, have teaching experience, and possess university credits in such areas as school law, management, and supervision. If state certification requirements also demand demonstration of knowledge and skills, they can help selectors identify qualified applicants.

Often, certification is little more than a *pro forma* requirement. In some states, like Georgia, however, those applying for certification must complete specified course requirements and take a competency test on which they must score at least 70 percent. Moreover, the score they receive remains part of their permanent record and selectors can use it to determine candidates' overall ranking. South Carolina not only requires all candidates for principal certification (who have not previously been principals) to undergo a state-administered assessment center evaluation (see Section III), but also demands that local school boards consider the assessment report in making their decisions. Helping potential leaders to complete certification requirements can enlarge the pool of potential applicants.

Training

A school system, whether public, private, or independent, should give its potential candidates training that will prepare them for the principalship. Selectors can achieve this in several ways. They can enlist the aid of educational consultants; collaborate with universities to frame courses for their trainees; or initiate their own development programs. Comprehensive preparation programs should feature excellent instructors, coherent requirements, and substantive content – focusing on curriculum, instruction, supervision, leadership, and theories of management and change. Requiring certain prerequisite skills to enroll and successful demonstration of them to exit, such programs also include field experience that gives trainees the opportunity to integrate theory and practice.

After the selection process has narrowed the pool to those with the required credentials, it should provide them with additional training including workshops, internships, apprenticeships, and mentoring. Internships and apprenticeships offer potential leaders a fine opportunity to acquire or practice necessary skills on-the-job. The presence of mentors allows prospective principals to exercise their creativity safely and gives veteran principals the chance to share their expertise with new administrators. Unfortunately, such arrangements, which are highly desirable, are still relatively rare.

Most large districts can easily arrange such training, as can groups of regional districts working together. With the help of educational service agencies, groups of small districts can form consortia to manage the development process as they do in New York (BOCES – Boards of Cooperative Educational Services) and Pennsylvania (IUs – Intermediate Units). Although this strategy requires that superintendents commit a great deal of time and energy, it is most likely to provide an adequate supply of well qualified candidates.

Maryland's Montgomery County, for example, offers many forms of training for future school leaders. In the early stages, they take courses in career development and administrative leadership; perform skill-building exercises; and do role-playing. Individuals admitted into the county's special training program (about 22 annually) spend a full year in a school working under an experienced principal. In addition, they attend courses, confer with their mentor regularly, and meet with a county supervisory team every month.

Final Formal Selection

The four final steps in selecting a principal require a job-focused search, assessment of the candidates' knowledge and skills, a formal decision, and assignment of the new principal.

Job-Focused Search

The search process should have started years in advance with the development of a pool of candidates, but it may be necessary to increase the number of good potential applicants. A job-focused search can begin with a list of where each of the current principals in the district came from. This will indicate how wide or narrow the target population has been in the past. The next task is to decide how to increase the pool without undue expense. One obvious way is to expand the geographical search area. Announcements can, for example, be placed in large circulation newspapers in cities within a 500-mile radius of the vacancy. If the district is itself a large city, the search committee might advertise the opening in similar cities. To avoid becoming too ingrown, search committees can advertise in principal and superintendent newsletters, in education journals, and in the publications or at the conferences of professional associations such as the National Association of Elementary School Principals, National Association of Secondary School Principals, National Association of Independent Schools, or National Catholic Educational Association. There are many options, but the most important thing is to avoid a narrow search that ends too soon.

Assessing Candidates and Making a Decision

Candidates are assessed on their basic leadership ability, as well as on the skills necessary to perform the tasks described in the section on the effective principal. In making a decision, the most important thing is to collect valid information from this assessment and then rely on it. In the next section, we suggest how to evaluate candidates' knowledge and skills using five specific assessment methods.

Placing Principals

All selection processes aim for a perfect match between the job and the person hired for it, but frequently the best available candidate is not perfect for the job. This problem can often be alleviated by creating a pool of future leaders because a "fit" is more likely when there are many contenders among whom to choose. In large districts, multiple vacancies should offer additional opportunities

to achieve the best fit. When the best available applicants are not ideal, supervisors need to give the principals they have selected technical support and supplemental resources to help them develop and improve on the job. Often opportunities to consult with experienced administrators or peers can give the new principal the help that he or she needs to perform effectively.

Post-Hiring Activities

Although the *search* for a principal ends when he or she is hired, the selection process is far from over. Selecting good leaders is only half the battle; the other half is helping them succeed and grow in the job. Well organized post-selection activities, including orientations, opportunities for networking, professional development, and ongoing evaluation are most likely to achieve this goal.

Orientation

Too often, principals are tossed into the job without sufficient support from their supervisors. Some, in fact, find that their performance is judged according to how little they bother the central office. Good superintendents, however, ensure that new principals are aware of the values, beliefs, and norms of the communities where they are assigned, and that they share the district's or supervisory body's aims and goals. Effective supervisors also provide the guidance and technical support from experienced peers that will help new principals adjust and succeed.

Professional Development

Continued professional development is not an optional benefit, but an absolute necessity. The best programs emphasize skill development, and give participants a chance to help plan their training goals and the activities used to achieve them. Assessing their own needs and setting specific training objectives involves principals more in learning. Effective developmental programs increase their awareness of new skills and help principals use them. As Jane Hammond, a principal training specialist, remarks, "Development programs without built-in technical assistance on the job are a blueprint for frustration and waste."

By continuing to study and learn, principals can demonstrate the importance of skill development to their staffs. Most states have created academies for school leaders to facilitate such professional development and many districts provide regular inservice training for principals. Monthly meetings and periodic retreats at the district level can also reinforce new skills acquired in training. Whether at academies, meetings, or retreats, however, the most effective training experiences for principals incorporate skill development with opportunities to learn from and with peers. Activities that encourage professional development provide essential support for new principals and help experienced ones keep abreast of recent research on effective leadership and schooling.

Since principals learn effectively from their peers, many school districts now encourage them to act as consultants for each other. Discussing how they approach difficult tasks on the job provides information and encouragement. Many districts encourage principals to visit each other's schools and exchange technical assistance. This reduces principals' isolation and gives them a chance to try new techniques supported by the safety net of experienced peers. In the Baltimore County Public Schools, for instance, new principals spend 3-5 days in the summer, as well as 1 day a month during the year, at training seminars, not only to help with skill development but also to develop a peer network. According to Deputy Superintendent Anthony Marchione, new principals are expected to form pairs or triads to observe each other and offer coaching and support.

Appraising Performance On the Job

The way a school system evaluates principals is related to the selection process because the criteria used to appraise their performance should be consistent with those used to select them. Although principals must be personally committed to improving, such improvement can be achieved only through constructive feedback based on agreed-upon standards.

In evaluating how well a principal performs, both those appraising and those being appraised must understand what kind of performance is expected. Moreover, supervisors must be trained in how to appraise. If they are, they will recognize that effective feedback on performance cannot be limited to a brief yearly meeting. Commitment and time are crucial. At regular, frequent intervals the principal should give his or her supervisor information that demonstrates progress on general, as well as specific, key goals. Periodically, supervisors should review the principal's progress, and offer coaching when needed. Effective appraisal results not only from good evaluation forms and technically sophisticated methods, but also from supervisors and principals who commit the time and energy to help school leaders improve their performance.

Summary

Matching the right principal with the right school sounds easier than it is. Only a comprehensive selection process makes this deceptively simple match possible. Without a sizable pool of well trained candidates, selectors will have too few experienced applicants from whom to choose. Unless the selection process includes well developed procedures for orienting and supporting principals, those chosen may wither on the vine. If they are not offered opportunities for professional enrichment and networking, even the "right" principals may never achieve their full potential.

Ten Steps to a Better Selection Process

Developing Policies

Step 1. Agree on your general aims for the schools and principals in your jurisdiction.
- Consult district, diocese, or governing body.
- Consult teachers, students, parents, and community concerning what kind of principal they want and need.

Establishing a Pool

Step 2. Determine what kind of preservice preparation is available and what kind is necessary.
- Check on programs at local universities, or
- consider initiating or developing one of your own.

Step 3. Determine certification requirements and procedures.

Step 4. Prepare qualified potential principals via apprenticeships, internships, and mentoring.

Formal Selection Procedures

Step 5. Advertise the vacancy widely among qualified potential applicants.

Step 6. Assess candidates' skills using the selection methods best calculated to discover information that you need.

Step 7. Choose a new principal based on all relevant, valid information.

Post-Hiring Activities

Step 8. Provide orientation for new principals, enabling them to meet members of the community, get to know their peers, and understand the nature and history of the school and community.

Step 9. Develop long-term programs that give principals multiple opportunities to develop their professional skills and enlarge their peer network.

Step 10. Appraise principals according to the selection criteria used to hire them, providing constructive feedback on their performance, and helping them improve via conferences, coaching, networking, and special training.

Section III

Assessment Methods: Theory and Practice

This section focuses on the five major methods used to appraise candidates from both the theoretical and practical standpoint and suggests how selectors can use these methods to get the information they need to make a decision.

Basic Selection Methods

When selectors evaluate individual candidates, they use one or more of five basic methods. They

- Collect biographical data;
- Administer written tests;
- Conduct structured interviews;
- Solicit job samples; and
- Consult assessment centers.

Biographical Data

Since past performance is the best single predictor of future performance, biographical data helps those screening candidates. Selectors usually get this information through written application forms and recommendations from references. Since some people overstate their experience, it is always important to contact candidates' references, as well as some of their other colleagues. Site visits to schools where the applicant is or has been an administrator are especially valuable because they allow selectors to observe the candidate in action and talk with those who know how the applicant performs. Sometimes it helps to phone references even after they have written a recommendation because they may reveal things in conversation that they would be reluctant to put in writing.

Written Tests

Paper and pencil tests can help determine whether candidates know specific information, have particular aptitudes, or can demonstrate certain skills. Candidates can, for example, show their knowledge of the state's school code and laws concerning school policy. They can also demonstrate particular aptitudes for budgeting or mathematical skills. Applicants can even be asked to write an impromptu essay, since the ability to write clearly and well is an immense asset for an effective principal. Selectors should be very cautious, however, about any test that claims to show who would be the best candidate for a principalship. Few standard psychological tests are likely to be useful in helping select the right principal. There are, however, some specially developed tests (for example, The Principal Perceiver)* that have proven useful in the selection process.

The application form can also be used to gather many kinds of information, in addition to basic statistics about background experience. It can be a kind of essay test that allows applicants to answer focused questions and display specific knowledge and skills. Candidates should be asked to give concrete examples of accomplishments, provide specific illustrations of past or proposed actions, and articulate their vision of what a school and a principal should be.

Structured Interviews

Normally, a candidate will have many interviews: with the selecting committee, parents, students, community representatives, and supervisors. Most selecting committees make an effort to have all candidates interviewed by several people simultaneously so that there will be a consensus about the applicant's performance. They also try to ensure that interviewers are well trained and that the interview is structured.

In a structured interview, selecting committees establish questions in advance and decide upon specific responses that are particularly desirable. In all structured interviews, candidates are asked the same questions so that interviewers can make fair comparisons.

Although any interview should elicit detailed information about past accomplishments, the best interviews encourage the candidate to demonstrate how he or she would apply certain knowledge or use specific skills. For example, interviewers might give applicants a hypothetical situation and ask them what they would do and why. The interviewer might even ask the candidate to demonstrate a specific action that he or she recommends.

Experienced interviewers are aware that the candidate should do most of the talking and that they should postpone judgment to give all applicants a fair chance. Interviewers should also remember not to ask any illegal questions about age,

*See Selection Research, Inc. in the listing of "Where To Go For Further Information."

gender, race, marital status, or plans to have a family, even though these subjects may come up in the conversation. Since interviews, like the four other methods of appraisal, are legally selection tests, they are subject to Federal (and state) laws governing testing and selection. Violating these rules has led to rejected candidates' suing prospective employers. To avoid such difficulties, selectors should conform to Equal Employment Opportunity Commission guidelines, and seek legal advice from personnel selection specialists. EEOC guidelines can also help districts to identify qualified candidates who may have been overlooked in the past.

Job Samples

Selectors can get job sample information by observing how candidates perform during site visits, when applicants act as interns during training, in simulated job situations, or from assessment center reports. On a site visit, selectors can, for example, observe how the potential principal deals with a group of underachievers or handles a meeting with disgruntled teachers. The structured interview can also provide some job sample data if the interviewer asks questions that require the applicant to display skills used by principals. When references are asked specific questions about candidates' skills on the job, such recommendations can also give useful job sample information.

Assessment Centers

One widely known, successful technique for selecting school principals uses "assessment centers." The kinds of techniques used in these centers were originally developed during World War II by the Office of Strategic Services which was trying to discover and increase leadership potential in its officers. Later, these techniques were refined and developed by industrial and organizational psychologists testing and selecting business managers and executives. Assessment centers are designed to provide valid on-the-job simulations that focus on the specific qualities and abilities that characterize an effective principal. The centers sponsored by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), which developed some of the first ones aimed at improving the selection process of school administrators, sometimes act as models for others originating their own assessment center approach. Several states and many regional and district agencies now sponsor such centers.

In these centers, candidates are presented with simulations of tasks that elementary and secondary school principals perform, including individual and group exercises. These exercises test their skills in problem analysis, judgment, organizational ability, decisiveness, leadership, sensitivity, stress tolerance, oral communication, written communication, range of interests, personal motivation, and educational values. Simulation exercises enable candidates to demonstrate the skills that they will need as school administrators. These simulations include problem-solving exercises, interviews, group discussions, case studies of school problems, and exercises in which participants handle all the material in a hypothetical principal's in-basket.

Exercises are designed to test personal analytical skills, as well as the ability to work effectively in groups with others. In a typical problem-solving exercise, participants read a brief description of a problem, find additional information from other sources, write up the solution they propose, and present it orally. In a group activity, on the other hand, those being assessed get background information about a school issue and are observed as they work together to reach a consensus.

Centers usually provide from three to ten planned activities which take most of 1 to 3 days to complete. Trained assessors observe the candidates and then, after applicants leave, prepare reports on them. Assessors give selectors or personnel specialists detailed reports, identifying candidates' strengths and weaknesses, and offer applicants feedback on their performance.

Which Methods to Use

Circumstances will dictate which combination of selection methods to use. Those looking for a troubleshooter may be particularly eager to observe the applicant's on-site ability to solve problems and his or her track record in maintaining discipline. Selectors seeking a principal to heal breaches between the school and community will want to examine the way the candidate handles interviews and public presentations and may want to get a professional assessment of his or her public relations skills. Since everyone wants a principal with well developed managerial skills, selectors may want to know how the candidate performed on managerial exercises at an assessment center or on some kind of in-house assessment exercises.

In general, selectors should always solicit biographical data, give structured interviews, and obtain job sample information. When it is crucial that a principal know particular information or possess specific knowledge, written tests are probably most helpful. Assessment centers, of course, provide a wealth of useful information. Deciding whether or not to use them depends on their accessibility, the cost, the number of candidates to be assessed, and how many principals selectors have to hire.

In deciding which methods to use, districts or other governing bodies will also have to consider which are most likely to achieve their aims, and fit their administrative situations, as well as their budgets. For small, rural districts, with few administrators, for example, it may be more practical to emphasize background information and interviews. Large metropolitan districts with easy access to assessment centers may find them an excellent alternative. Smaller districts without such access may want to design selected activities similar to those used in centers. Just as principal selection is always site-specific, so the use of selection methods should be tailored to the individual circumstances of those selecting the school leader. This does not mean, however, that each selection decision can be treated as a unique event. The policy of the district or governing body, as well as its standardized procedure for assessing candidates, will determine the methods they use.

Summary

The five selection methods reviewed here are all useful. In some circumstances, it will be beneficial to use them all; in others, that may not be necessary. The methods selectors use depend on their goals and on the school's specific circumstances. Since selecting personnel is both a science and an art, selectors should expect to emphasize different methods depending upon the candidate and the situation. The various ways selection methods can be used are virtually unlimited—they are bounded only by the imagination of those using them.

Conclusion

All of the principals in the United States, assembled together, would just fill the Rose Bowl. This is an unlikely assemblage, to be sure, but one that illustrates the importance of principals as members of a relatively small cadre of school leaders who can define and promote educational excellence.

The principalship is the single most powerful force for improving school effectiveness. Although better selection of school leaders is not the complete remedy for educational problems, it offers an important beginning. An effective selection process based on a clear view of the principal's role, combined with better preparation, orientation, development, and evaluation, can help usher in a new era of productivity in American education. This *Guide* is for those who are willing to commit time, energy, and resources to improve principal selection—as a major step toward bettering American schools.

The adroit selection of school leaders requires more time, diligence, and resources than it currently receives. Yet sound selection is one of the most economical options for significantly improving schools. Secretary Bennett has hailed employment of an outstanding principal as a "$50,000 solution" to school-level education problems. Effective school reform, however, comes not from Washington, nor even from governors—important as they are in the "reform movement." Educational change happens school by school, initiated and guided by strong school leaders. Thus, developing, selecting, and supporting effective educational leaders is a key to achieving the excellence that Americans want and deserve.

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Where to Go for Further Information

A computer software package has been specifically prepared to accompany this booklet to help you tailor your selection procedure to your specific circumstances. If you would like to obtain this software package, contact:

Information Services
555 New Jersey Avenue NW.
Washington, DC 20208
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For more information about this guide, contact Gene Huddle (202-357-6560) or Marshall Sashkin (202-357-6116) at the address above.

The people listed below are particularly knowledgeable about principals and principal selection. Some were on the advisory panel or acted as peer reviewers; others are well-known educational experts with whom the project team consulted. If you are interested in investigating other aspects of principal selection or in doing additional research on some of the aspects presented here, you might find it helpful to consult the following people:

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Principal Selection Checklist

This list identifies the major elements of the selection process. It may help you to compare this list with the procedure that you follow.

	Not used	Used to some extent	Integral part of the process
Developing a pool:			
pooling	☐	☐	☐
preparation & training	☐	☐	☐
internships	☐	☐	☐
Selecting and placing:			
developing assessment information	☐	☐	☐
effective decision process	☐	☐	☐
placement plan	☐	☐	☐
Post-hiring:			
orientation	☐	☐	☐
staff development plan	☐	☐	☐
performance appraisal process	☐	☐	☐

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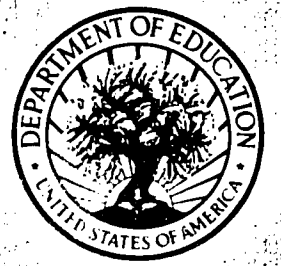

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